

CHAPTER 18

THE PEACEFUL METHOD OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

18.1 THE PEACEFUL METHOD OF STRUGGLE IN THE MUSLIM STATE

In this fatwa we have proven that it is impermissible to rebel against the Muslim state, even if its rulers are corrupt and oppressive. Certain questions naturally arise: What should Muslims do to counter the oppression and cruelty of the rulers? Should the rulers have free reign to do what they like? Should the followers of truth sit back idly as silent spectators? If not, then what are their responsibilities in those circumstances? If Islam disapproves of armed rebellion and, at the same time, condemns silence in the face of oppression, what options are available for the citizens of the Muslim state to bring about change?

18.2 THE QUR'ĀNIC COMMAND TO ENJOIN THE GOOD AND FORBID THE EVIL

In Islamic terminology, the act of promoting good and preventing wrong is called 'enjoining the good and forbidding the evil' [*al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahī 'an al-munkar*]. This religiously mandated act is to be applied at the individual and governmental levels.

In the Qur'ān, God has commanded the believers to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. The importance of this command is reflected in the verse of the Qur'ān where it is listed amongst the qualities of 'the balanced *Umma*':

﴿كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ﴾

'You are the best nation raised up for mankind; you enjoin the good and forbid the evil'.¹

Elsewhere, God says,

﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ

الْمُنْكَرِ﴾

¹ Qur'ān 3:110.

*‘And the believing men and women are allies to one another; they enjoin the good and forbid the evil’.*¹

Although this responsibility falls on individuals in an Islamic society, we must bear in mind that isolated, individual efforts to change wrongs committed by the government are often without much effect. Efforts to bring change and reform in society should ideally be collective, which is why organized grassroots movements are justified in Islamic law.

18.3 THE COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO ENJOIN THE GOOD AND FORBID THE EVIL

The effort to enjoin the good and forbid the evil is both an individual and collective endeavour. God says in the Qur’ān,

﴿وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾

*‘And let their arise amongst you a group that invites to good and enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong. And it is they who are the successful’.*²

This verse informs us that enjoining the good and forbidding the evil on the collective level contributes to its effectiveness, productivity and benefit. This is in fulfilment of the Qur’ānic command:

﴿وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ﴾

*‘And help one another with piety and righteousness, and do not help one another with sin and transgression’.*³

¹ Ibid., 9:71.

² Ibid., 3:104.

³ Ibid., 5:2.

18.4 HADITH REPORTS CONCERNING THE ACT OF ENJOINING THE GOOD AND FORBIDDING THE EVIL

The prophetic traditions speak of the importance of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and the dire consequences of neglecting them. Hudhayfa رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,

فِتْنَةُ الرَّجُلِ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَمَالِهِ وَجَارِهِ تَكْفُرُهَا الصَّلَاةُ وَالصَّدَقَةُ وَالْأَمْرُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيُ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ.

‘The tribulations a man faces with regard to his family, wealth and neighbours are expiated by prayer, charity and the act of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil’.¹

Hudhayfa رضي الله عنه also reported that the Prophet ﷺ said,

وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ، لَتَأْمُرَنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ أَوْ لَيُوشِكَنَّ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عِقَابًا مِنْهُ، ثُمَّ تَدْعُونَهُ فَلَا يُسْتَجَابُ لَكُمْ.

‘By the One in whose Hand rests my soul, you must surely enjoin the good and forbid the evil, otherwise it is expected that God will send against you a punishment from Him, and then you will supplicate Him but will not be answered’.²

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-‘Alā’ al-Ḥaḍramī رضي الله عنه said, ‘Someone informed me that he heard the Messenger of God ﷺ say,

¹ Narrated by al-Bukhārī in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-manāqib* [The Book of Exemplary Virtues], chapter: ‘The Signs of Prophethood in Islam’, 3:1314 §3393; and Muslim in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-fitan wa ashrāt al-sā‘a* [The Book of Tribulations and the Portents of the Final Hour], chapter: ‘Regarding the Tribulations That Will Descend Like a Crashing Wave’, 4:2218 §2889.

² Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-fitan* [The Book of Tribulations], chapter: ‘What Has Come to Us Concerning the Act of Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 4:468 §2169; Ibn Mājah in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-fitan* [The Book of Tribulation], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 2:1327 §4004; and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 5:391 §23375.

إِنَّ مِنْ أُمَّتِي قَوْمًا يُعْطَوْنَ مِثْلَ أَجُورِ أَوَّلِهِمْ، فَيُنْكِرُونَ الْمُنْكَرَ.

“Indeed, from my *Umma* there are a folk who shall receive rewards equivalent to the rewards of the early ones [my Companions]—they forbid the evil”.¹

Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,

لَتَأْمُرَنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، أَوْ لَيَسْلُطَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ شِرَارَكُمْ، ثُمَّ يَدْعُو خِيَارَكُمْ فَلَا يَسْتَجَابُ لَكُمْ.

‘You must surely enjoin the good and forbid the evil, otherwise God will cause the evil ones in your midst to gain authority over you, and then the best of you will supplicate but you will not be answered’.²

Anas b. Mālīk رضي الله عنه said,

قُلْنَا: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، لَا نَأْمُرُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَتَّى نَعْمَلَ بِهِ، وَلَا نَنْهَى عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ حَتَّى نَجْتَنِبَهُ كُلَّهُ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: بَلْ مُرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَعْمَلُوا بِهِ كُلَّهُ، وَانْهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَجْتَنِبُوهُ كُلَّهُ.

‘We said, “O Messenger of God! We shall abstain from enjoining the good until we act on it ourselves, and we shall abstain from forbidding the evil until we also turn away from it”. He replied, “No. Rather, you should enjoin the good, even if you do not act upon it entirely, and you should forbid the evil, even if you do not turn away from it entirely”’.³

The aforementioned traditions inform us of the significance and importance of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. This

¹ Narrated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 4:62 §16643; and 5:375 §23299; and al-Haythamī in *Majma‘ al-zawā'id*, 7:261, 271.

² Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu‘jam al-awsaṭ*, 2:99 §1379; Ibn Abī Shayba in *al-Muṣannaf*, 7:460 §37221; al-Bazzār in *al-Musnad*, 1:292–293 §188; and Abū Ya‘lā in *al-Musnad*, 8:313 §6916.

³ Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu‘jam al-awsaṭ*, 6:365 §6628; al-Bayhaqī in *Shu‘ab al-Imān*, 6:89 §7570; and al-Haythamī in *Majma‘ al-zawā'id*, 7:277.

praiseworthy act expiates sins, removes tribulations from our lives and serves as a shield against Divine wrath. If we take account of ourselves and our current predicament, we will see that we are suffering the consequences of our neglect of this righteous act. Our prayers go unanswered, natural disasters and calamities are increasing and lawlessness, murder, corruption and unemployment are on the rise. In short, there is not a single tribulation that has not engulfed us.

18.5 THE THREE LEVELS OF FORBIDDING THE EVIL

The Prophet ﷺ has described to us three levels in the act of forbidding evil. Abū Sa‘īd رضي الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said,

مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ
وَذَلِكَ أَضْعَفُ الْإِيمَانِ.

‘Whoever amongst you witnesses an evil, let him reform it [practically] with his hand; if he is unable, then [let him denounce it] verbally; and if he is unable, then [let him abhor it] in his heart—and that is the weakest form of faith’.¹

This hadith delineates three methods of condemning evil: through the hand, the tongue and the heart. This means that one should take practical steps to remove evil, speak out about it and detest it in his or her heart. Each of these three ways is a peaceful means of change. To forbid evil with one’s hands is to struggle against it

¹ Narrated by Muslim in *al-Shaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān* [The Book of Faith], chapter: ‘The Act of Forbidding Evil is a Part of Faith’, 1:69 §49; al-Tirmidhī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-fitan* [The Book of Tribulation], chapter: ‘What Has Come to Us Concerning the Interpretation of Forbidding Evil with the Hand, Tongue and Heart’, 4:469 §2172; Abū Dāwūd in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-malāḥim* [The Book of Tumultuous Battles], chapter: ‘On Commanding and Forbidding’, 4:123 §4340; al-Nasā’ī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-Īmān wa al-sharā’i’uḥu* [The Book of Faith and its Revealed Laws], chapter: ‘The Varying Ranks of the Faithful’, 8:111 §5008; Ibn Mājah in *al-Sunan: Kitāb iqāmat al-ṣalāt wa al-Sunna fihā* [The Book of Establishing the Prayer and the Sunna Therein], chapter: ‘What Has Come to Us Concerning the Ritual prayer of Two Eids’, 1:406 §1275.

in the physical realm; but it must be free of violence because good cannot be forced on others through oppression, as God says,

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ﴾

*‘There is no compulsion in religion’.*¹

The command to physically forbid evil is communally obligatory upon those who are able; otherwise, the believers are ordered to denounce it verbally, and if that is not possible, they must at least detest it in their hearts. What is encompassed in the definition of evil? Here, people have restricted its usage to a more literal and limited sense. The fact remains that evil also includes domestic violence against women and deprivation of their rights, as well as every form of corruption, disruption, violence, violation of human rights, nepotism, and promotion of what is forbidden in the Islamic Sacred Law.

18.6 THE MEANING OF FORBIDDING EVIL PHYSICALLY

Imagine a society in which evil is widespread and the command to forbid it by hand is interpreted as the use of physical force. Every individual and group would have their own conception of good and begin imposing it on others. Such a situation would create unrest, lawlessness and violence. Furthermore, if ‘forbidding the evil’ is carried out by means of firearms and explosives, civil war will occur and more evil will spread.

How can the Islamic faith, which does not permit Muslims to take up arms and revolt against corrupt rulers for the sake of social justice and peace, allow the use of violence to prevent evil? Hence, for the common citizen, forbidding the evil is done through practical, non-violent means according to his or her ability.

If preventing evil means eradicating it by using physical force, then it becomes the responsibility of the government to undertake its execution. The government is the only entity vested with the authority to use force in the removal of evil—this, in fact, is what justifies its existence in the first place. God says,

¹ Qur’ān 2:256.

﴿الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا
عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَقِيبُ الْأُمُورِ﴾

‘[The believers are those] *who, if We establish their rule in the earth, establish the prayer, pay the Zakat, enjoin the good and forbid the evil. And to God belongs the final results of all things*’.¹

18.7 POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE AGAINST INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION

Islam seeks to establish societies based on justice and equity: societies in which no one encroaches on the rights of others or seeks to wield his or her strength, authority, wealth or status unjustly. It is the responsibility of a Muslim to raise his or her voice and speak out against the oppression and excesses of individuals or governments. God has enjoined the believers to expose the cruelty of oppressors:

﴿لَا يُحِبُّ اللَّهُ الْجَهْرَ بِالسُّوءِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ إِلَّا مَنْ ظَلِمَ ۖ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعًا عَلِيمًا﴾

‘God does not like the public mention of evil except by the one who has been wronged. And God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing’.²

As Muslims, we are urged to voice our protest against oppression and injustice. In fact, declaring a word of justice in the presence of an oppressive ruler is considered the highest form of jihad. Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,

إِنَّ مِنْ أَعْظَمِ الْجِهَادِ كَلِمَةً عَدْلٍ عِنْدَ سُلْطَانٍ جَائِرٍ.

‘Indeed, from the greatest forms of jihad is a just word spoken before a tyrannical ruler’.³

¹ Ibid., 22:41.

² Ibid., 4:148.

³ Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-fitan* [The Book of Tribulations], chapter: ‘What Has Come to Us Concerning the Fact That the Best Jihad is a Screen View Only—Click to get a hard copy: <http://www.MinhajPublications.com>

In a narration from Abū Dāwūd, the word ‘tyrannical emir’ is used in place of ‘tyrannical ruler’.¹ The Prophet ﷺ forbade the believers from concealing the truth out of fear. Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,

لَا يَمْنَعَنَّ رَجُلًا هَيْبَةُ النَّاسِ أَنْ يَقُولَ بِحَقِّ إِذَا عَلِمَهُ.

‘Let not any man shrink from saying the truth out of fear of people if he knows it’.²

The Prophet ﷺ also warned people from abandoning the duty of forbidding the evil when they are capable,

مَا مِنْ قَوْمٍ يُعْمَلُ فِيهِمْ بِالْمَعَاصِي، ثُمَّ يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى أَنْ يُغَيِّرُوا، ثُمَّ لَا يُغَيِّرُوا إِلَّا يُوشِكُ أَنْ يُعَمَّهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْهُ بِعِقَابٍ.

‘There is no nation in which acts of disobedience are committed but they do not stop them, even though they are able, save that it is expected that God will cover them all with a punishment’.³

‘Adī b. Ḥātim رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُعَذِّبُ الْعَامَّةَ بِعَمَلِ الْخَاصَّةِ حَتَّى يَرَوْا الْمُنْكَرَ بَيْنَ ظَهْرَانِيهِمْ، وَهُمْ قَادِرُونَ عَلَى أَنْ يُنْكِرُوهُ فَلَا يُنْكِرُوهُ. فَإِذَا فَعَلُوا ذَلِكَ عَذَّبَ اللَّهُ الْخَاصَّةَ وَالْعَامَّةَ.

Just Word before a Tyrannical Ruler’, 4:471 §2174.

¹ Narrated by Abū Dāwūd in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-malāḥim* [The Book of Tumultuous Battles], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 4:124 §4344.

² Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-ḥitan* [The Book of Tribulations], chapter: ‘What Has Been Reported Regarding the Prophet ﷺ Informing His Companions of All That Would Occur until the Day of Resurrection’, 4:483 §2191; Ibn Mājah in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-ḥitan* [The Book of Tribulation], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 2:1328 §4007; and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 3:5 §11030.

³ Narrated by Abū Dāwūd in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-malāḥim* [The Book of Tumultuous Battles], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 4:122 §4338; Ibn Mājah in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-ḥitan* [The Book of Tribulation], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 2:1329 §4009; and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 4:364 §19250.

‘Indeed, God does not punish all for the actions of the few until the former witness evil in their midst and fail to stop it even though they are able. When that occurs, God shall punish them collectively: the few and the many’.¹

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq رضي الله عنه said,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّكُمْ تَقْرُؤُونَ هَذِهِ الْآيَةَ: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَنْ ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ﴾ وَإِنَّا سَمِعْنَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ النَّاسَ إِذَا رَأَوْا الْمُنْكَرَ فَلَمْ يُنْكِرُوهُ أَوْشَكَ أَنْ يَعْتَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِعِقَابِهِ.

‘O people! Surely, you all read the verse, “O you who believe! Take care of your own selves. If you are guided, then no one who is astray can harm you” [Qur’ān 5:105]. Indeed, we heard the Messenger of God ﷺ say, “It is to be expected that if a people witness evil but do not censure it, God will cover them all with His punishment”.’²

Jarīr رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,

مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ يَكُونُ فِي قَوْمٍ يُعْمَلُ فِيهِمْ بِالْمَعَاصِي، يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى أَنْ يُغَيِّرُوا عَلَيْهِ، فَلَا يُغَيِّرُوا إِلَّا أَصَابَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِعَذَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَمُوتُوا.

‘There are no people in the midst of whom a man does acts of disobedience, and they have the ability to stop him, but do not, except that God will afflict them with a punishment before they die’.³

¹ Narrated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 4:192; Mālik in *al-Muwattāʾ: Kitāb al-kalām* [The Book of Speech], chapter: ‘What Has Come to Us Concerning the Punishment of All for the Acts of the Few’, 2:991 §1799; and al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, 17:139.

² Narrated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 1:2 §1.

³ Narrated by Abū Dāwūd in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-malāḥim* [The Book of Tumultuous Battles], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 4:122 §4339; Ibn Mājah in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-ḥitan* [The Book of Tribulation], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 2:1329 §4009; and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 4:364; Ibn Ḥibbān in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:536 §300; and al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, 2:332 §2382.

Abū ‘Ubayda رضي الله عنه reported that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,
 إِنَّ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لَمَّا وَقَعَ فِيهِمُ النَّقْصُ كَانَ الرَّجُلُ يَرَى أَخَاهُ عَلَى الذَّنْبِ فَيَنْهَاهُ
 عَنْهُ. فَإِذَا كَانَ الْعَدُوُّ لَمْ يَمْنَعُهُ مَا رَأَى مِنْهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ أَكِيلَهُ وَشَرِبِيَّهُ وَخَلِيطَهُ. فَضَرَبَ
 اللَّهُ قُلُوبَ بَعْضِهِمْ بِبَعْضٍ، وَنَزَلَ فِيهِمُ الْقُرْآنُ. فَقَالَ: «لَعَنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ بَنِي
 إِسْرَائِيلَ عَلَى لِسَانِ دَاوُدَ وَعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ». فَقَرَأَ
 حَتَّى بَلَغَ: «وَلَوْ كَانُوا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ مَا اتَّخَذُوا أَوْلِيَاءَ وَلَكِنَّ
 كَثِيرًا مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ». قَالَ: وَكَانَ نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ مُتَكِنًا، فَجَلَسَ، فَقَالَ: لَا، حَتَّى تَأْخُذُوا
 عَلَى يَدِ الظَّالِمِ فَتَأْطُرُوهُ عَلَى الْحَقِّ أَطْرًا.

‘When shortcomings befell the Children of Israel, a man would witness his brother committing a sin and forbid him from it, but the sin he saw from him would not prevent him from eating, drinking and mingling with him the next day. As a result, God afflicted them with hatred, and the Qur’ān revealed about them: “*Cursed were those who disbelieved amongst the Children of Israel by the tongue of David and Jesus the son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and continually transgressed. . . . If only they had believed in God and the Prophet and what was revealed to him, they would not have taken them as protecting friends; but many of them are corrupt*”.’ Abū ‘Ubayda added, ‘The Messenger of God ﷺ was reclining, and then he sat up and said, “No [you cannot escape the same fate] until you hold the hand of the oppressor and prevent him and lead him to the truth!”.’¹

Al-Nu‘mān b. Bashīr رضي الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said,

¹ Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur’ān* [The Book of Qur’ānic Exegesis], chapter: ‘From *Sūra al-Mā’ida*’, 5:252 §3048; Abū Dāwūd in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-malāḥim* [The Book of Tumultuous Battles], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 4:121 §4336; Ibn Mājah in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-ḥudūd* [The Book of Tribulation], chapter: ‘Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil’, 2:1327 §4006; and al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr*, 10:146 §10268, and *al-Mu’jam al-awsat*, 1:166 §519.

مَثَلُ الْمُدْهِنِ فِي حُدُودِ اللَّهِ وَالْوَاقِعِ فِيهَا مَثَلُ قَوْمٍ اسْتَهْمُوا سَفِينَةً فَصَارَ بَعْضُهُمْ فِي
 أَسْفَلِهَا وَصَارَ بَعْضُهُمْ فِي أَعْلَاهَا. فَكَانَ الَّذِي فِي أَسْفَلِهَا يَمْرُونَ بِالْمَاءِ عَلَى الَّذِينَ
 فِي أَعْلَاهَا فَتَأَذُّوْا بِهِ. فَأَخَذَ قَاسًا فَجَعَلَ يَنْقُرُ أَسْفَلَ السَّفِينَةِ. فَاتَوْهُ فَقَالُوا: مَا لَكَ؟
 قَالَ: تَأَذِّبْتُمْ بِي وَلَا بُدَّ لِي مِنَ الْمَاءِ. فَإِنْ أَخَذُوا عَلَى يَدَيْهِ أَنْجَوْهُ وَنَجَّوْا أَنْفُسَهُمْ،
 وَإِنْ تَرَكُوهُ أَهْلَكُوهُ وَأَهْلَكُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ.

‘The likeness of the one who is lax in applying the prescribed limits of God and the one who transgresses against them is like that of a people who cast lots in boarding a ship. A group of them go to the lower deck and some of them stay on the upper deck. When those in the lower deck want water, one of them goes to the occupants of the upper deck until they are annoyed by him. He then starts to punch a hole in the lower deck [for water], and those of the upper deck go to him and ask, “What is wrong with you?” He replies, “I was annoying you, but I must have water!” If they take him by his hand and stop him they will save him and themselves, but if they leave him they will destroy him and themselves’.¹

Since exposing the injustice and oppression of the rulers is an important responsibility on the Muslims, and since it must be peaceful and democratic, there are a number of ways in which it may be done in contemporary times:

- Using one’s freedom of expression and denouncing oppression
- Speaking out against evil through books, literature and other forms of media
- Protesting against violations of human rights through peaceful demonstrations and rallies

¹ Narrated by al-Bukhārī in *al-Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-shahādāt* [The Book of Testimonies], chapter: ‘On the Drawing of Lots for Resolving Problems’, 2:954 §2540; al-Tirmidhī in *al-Sunan: Kitāb al-fitan* [The Book of Tribulations], chapter: ‘What Has Come to Us Concerning the Act of Changing Wrongs with the Hand, Tongue or Heart’, 4:470 §2173; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in *al-Musnad*, 4:270; and al-Bazzār in *al-Musnad*, 8:238 §3298.

- Organizing conferences and workshops that highlight political injustice
- Awakening the collective consciousness through speeches, writings and public consensus building
- Struggling at the political level to bring change to the government through constitutional and democratic means—sometimes these efforts become obligatory at the individual and organizational levels, and any failure to meet the challenge becomes an invitation to God’s wrath
- Raising one’s voice at the floor of parliament, calling for the rule of law and the granting of basic necessities and demanding the protection of human rights and the eradication of oppression and violence

18.8 MUSLIMS LIVING IN NON-MUSLIM COUNTRIES

Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries—whether as refugees, natural born citizens, permanent residents or students living there temporarily—are all duty-bound to obey the laws of the land (as long as the laws do not entail disobedience to God) and contribute positively to society at large. It is forbidden to violate the law, foment sedition or otherwise harm peaceful citizens.

We have the best example in the lives of the Prophet’s Companions, who, at the Prophet’s order ﷺ, immigrated to Christian Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) and enjoyed the support of its ruler, the Negus. God revealed in the Qur’ān,

﴿وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا فِي اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا ظَلَمُوا لَنَبُوْنَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَلَا جَزَاءُ
الْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ﴾

*‘And to those who migrated from their homes in the cause of God, after suffering oppression, We shall surely give a goodly home in this world; but the reward of the Hereafter will be even greater’.*¹

Imam al-Qurṭubī commented on this verse in his exegesis: ‘Qatāda said, “They are the Companions of Muhammad ﷺ. The pagans of

¹ Qur’ān 16:41.

Mecca wronged them and expelled them, until a group of them reached Abyssinia, then God Most High granted them an abode of migration and gave them helpers amongst the believers”.¹

In another verse related to the Companions’ immigration to Abyssinia, God said,

﴿يَعْبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّ أَرْضِي وَاسِعَةٌ فَإِيَّيَ فَاعْبُدُونِ﴾


‘O My servants who have believed! Indeed, My earth is vast so worship Me’.²

Ibn Kathīr commented:

This is a command from God Most High to His believing servants that they emigrate from the land in which they are unable to practise the religion to God’s spacious earth, so they will be able to exercise the religion freely . . . so when the disenfranchised in Mecca found their stay there difficult, then immigrated to the land of Abyssinia so they could practise their religion in safety. And so, they found a most gracious host, the Negus, King of Ethiopia, may God Most High have mercy upon him.³

Umm Salama  said,

‘When we arrived in Abyssinia, we were in the company of the best neighbour—the Negus! He granted us protection, allowing us to practise our religion, and we worshipped God Most High unharmed’.⁴


In a narration in Ibn Ishāq’s biography of the Prophet , it is mentioned that Abyssinia was chosen as a place of immigration because it was a land of truthfulness, and its King oppressed


¹ Muhammad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li ahkām al-Qur’ān*, 10:107.

² Qur’ān 29:56.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Aẓīm*, 2:571.

⁴ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 1:413.

no one.¹ Ibn Hishām reported with a fully connected chain of narration from Zuhri that Umm Salama  said,

By God! We were upon that [peace and security] until a person from the Ethiopians challenged his kingdom. By God! I don't think we were ever as saddened as we were that day, fearing that this person might defeat the Negus and come to power, not acknowledging our rights as the Negus did. The Negus went out to meet him in battle whilst between them was the Nile. The Companions of the Messenger of God  said, 'Which man amongst us is willing to go out to witness the battle and then tell us the news?' Al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwām said, 'I will', whereupon they said, 'Then it is you', and he was the youngest of them. They blew into a waterskin for him and he placed it on his chest. He then swam on it towards the place off of the Nile where the battle was taking place until he reached it. We then prayed to God Most High for the Negus, that he achieve victory over his enemy and gain authority in his land. By God! As we were expecting the outcome, suddenly, al-Zubayr raced towards us with [water] glistening off of his garments, saying, 'Shall I not give you all the good news? The Negus was victorious and God destroyed his enemy and gave him authority in his land!' By God! I don't think we were ever as delighted as we were on that day.²

This amazing narration teaches us many important lessons. We learn that Islam does not teach us a binary, black-or-white view of things, where others are either completely 'good' and 'Islamic' or completely 'bad' and 'un-Islamic'. At the time of the Companions' immigration to Abyssinia, the Negus was not a Muslim, yet the Companions had no problems describing him positively. We also learn the importance of living in an environment of peace and security for the proper practice of our religion—even if

¹ Ibid., 1:397.

² Ibid., 1:376.

that environment is not one hundred per cent ‘Islamic’ in every way. Most importantly, we learn from this story that it is from the etiquette of Islam to pray for the well-being and continued temporal authority of just rulers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. In the contemporary context, this can include voting for a non-Muslim candidate that stands for justice or is, at least, better amongst others. Praying for the victory of a non-Muslim ruler is no different from voting him or her into office—both are permissible means, contrary to the claims of the Kharijites who claim that voting is polytheism that expels one from the religion.

18.9 CONCLUSION

I ask God Most High to make this fatwa a source of clarity and guidance for all of humanity. I pray that God, through the means of this fatwa, opens the eyes of the confused, establishes the proof against the corrupt and makes it a positive step in eliminating the scourge of terrorism that plagues our lands. And my final prayer is: All praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds, and may blessings and salutations be upon our master Muhammad, and upon his family, Companions and all who follow his excellent example until the Last Day. Amen.